

NIAGARA ERIE REGIONAL COALITION

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Co-Chairs:

Hon. Clyde Burmaster
Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

Minutes of Niagara Erie Regional Coalition Meeting May 11, 2007

Members:

James Allen
Hon. Vince Anello
Dr. Ruth Bereson
Colleen DiPirro
Tim Doolittle
Hon. Wright Ellis
Andrew Eszak
Samuel Ferraro
Hon. Joel Giambra
Robert Gower
Hon. Michele Iannello
Hon. Timothy Kennedy
Hon. Kathy Konst
David Lacki
Celeste Lawson
Gregory Lewis
Hon. Peter McMahon
Hon. John Mills
Hal Morse
Hon. Jason Murgia
Jo Nasoff-Finton
Hon. Sean O'Connor
John Percy
Dr. Gary Praetzel
David Roll
Hon. William Ross
Laura St. Pierre Smith
Christopher Schoepflin
Hector Titus
Timothy Wanamaker
Peter Wendel

Present: Burmaster, Weinstein, Allen, Anello, Ferraro, Gower, Konst, Lacki, Mills, Morse, Nasoff-Finton, Praetzel, Roll, Ross, St. Pierre Smith, Titus, Wendel

Excused: DiPirro, Doolittle, Ellis, Iannello, Lewis, McMahon, O'Connor, Percy, Enstice, Rath Sanderson

Absent: Bereson, Eszak, Giambra, Kennedy, Lawson, Murgia, Schoepflin, Wanamaker, Casale, Witul

The meeting was called to order at 8:40 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chairs Clyde Burmaster and Barry Weinstein, MD. ENRP Member Jo Nasoff Finton and the Erie County Industrial Development Agency were thanked for hosting the meeting.

Minutes of the February 2007 meeting were approved.

New member Erie County Legislature 10th District Representative Michele Iannello was welcomed.

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Matthew Enstice
Melinda Rath Sanderson
Lawrence Witul

Executive Director:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Regional Coalition Executive Director Tod A. Kniazuk presented the sustainability update. The beginning balance for the period was \$2,739.12 and the ending balance was \$4,077.05. Kniazuk noted that the contract for work with the Arts Council is done (and with it the health insurance), and therefore the organization is again responsible for the entirety of the hours worked. We have received 2007 membership contributions from the Amherst Industrial Development Agency (Allen), Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County through contract work (Lawson), Council of Utility Contractors (Titus), Empire State Development/USA Niagara Development Corporation (Doolittle), Erie County Association of Local Governments (McMahon), Erie County Industrial Development Agency through housing and hosting (Nasoff Finton), National Electrical Contractors Organization (Roll), Niagara County Center for Economic Development through hosting (Ferraro), Niagara County

Legislature, Niagara County Supervisors Association (Ellis), and Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD.

Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed.

Kniazuk presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. A brief discussion was held on the Regional Economic Development Strategy; Nasoff reiterated the next steps for the project, and Weinstein reiterated his desire to see the report go public.

Subcommittee Chair David Lacki presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. Lacki invited everyone to attend the rollout of the "Arts & Economic Prosperity III" report in June, and also mentioned the features of The Big Easy in Buffalo series. Kniazuk added that both these projects are bringing good publicity to the group.

Subcommittee Chair Peter Wendel presented the Transportation Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. On the topic of the Framework for Regional Growth, Regional Coalition Member Laura St. Pierre Smith noted that the Buffalo Niagara Partnership presented the Framework to the IDA Leadership Council and asked them to take it back to their IDAs and adopt the document's principles.

The group then turned to the meeting's main topic, a Focus on Economic Development.

The first topic was the Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC) 2030 long range plan, presented by GBNRTC Executive Director and Regional Coalition Member Hal Morse. Morse explained that there is a new statewide strategy for transportation, and also a bi-national transportation strategy. These, as well as the Framework for Regional Growth, will be integrated with the GBRTC plan.

Some of the goals of the plan are to reverse the current economic development, land use, social and demographic trends; and to rebuild and maintain infrastructure (and grow if needed). They are also looking at system performance measures – everything

from the age of buses and commute times to income, emissions, and transit ridership.

Co-Chair Burmaster asked why commute times have decreased in the area. Morse, Nasoff, and Co-Chair Weinstein replied that some of the decrease is the positive result of efforts like congestion management, some of it is due to the negative of a decrease in population, and some of it is just a shift in where the jobs are located in the region.

Morse continued that while the trends of 1980-2000 showed a decrease in population and economic development, it would be illogical to simply extrapolate them forward. As such, they are forecasting that by 2030 the region will recapture most of its economy and population. The plan shows investment of \$6.1 billion over the next 23 years from federal, state, local, and private sources.

Some elements of the plan are:

- Widen I-90
- 90-290 interchange
- Williamsville toll barrier
- Connect the three UB campuses
- Connect Buffalo and Niagara Falls
- Southtowns access
- Outer Harbor bridge
- Return vehicles to Main Street, Buffalo
- Removal of Robert Moses Parkway
- Human Services transportation plan
- Economic development set-aside
- Traffic signal upgrades
- Continue technology implementation
- Help minimize other infrastructure needs by focusing growth

Morse also spoke about the GBNRTC Transportation Improvement Program, a five year plan that is updated every two years. That plan calls for \$1.1 billion in investment over the next five years on several hundred projects. Those projects include more bridge and road rehabilitation and infrastructure, as well as increased accessibility.

Delivering some of the local projects has been challenging due to local fiscal issues, Morse noted, but they are trying to work with the

localities rather than punish them. In a perfect world, Nasoff asked, would it be better to have a more centralized project manager? Morse replied that in the past New York State was manager for more projects, but localities felt they were doing their projects and not what the municipalities wanted.

Wendel inquired whether planning could keep up with new requirements in the ability to move traffic. Weinstein opined that it takes a generation to respond and implement changes, and Morse added that this is why connecting transportation planning to land use planning to focus growth where there is existing infrastructure is so important.

Lacki referred back to the mention of decreased population, and wondered why then there is an increase in traffic. The answer? More cars.

Regional Coalition Member Vince Anello asserted that the complete removal of the Robert Moses Parkway is “pure fantasy” because you cannot justify building a new road. Morse noted that the plan is just calling for the removal of the portion from the 190 to the city.

Regional Coalition member John Mills asked why we’re spending \$85 million to extend Route 219 by four miles when our existing infrastructure is “falling apart.” Regional Coalition Member Kathy Konst added that the extension would “kill” economic development in Springville.

St. Pierre Smith concluded the discussion on this topic, saying that in other regions market demand for transportation has led to increased taxes, tolls, and privatization to meet infrastructure needs, while here we’re trying to lower taxes and take tolls down.

Concluding the focus on economic development, Regional Coalition Member David Roll updated the group on “Explore Buffalo Niagara 2007”, the effort to bring executives from around the world to the region in an effort to get them to locate business here. The effort is being co-chaired by Roll, Ferraro, and Kevin Donovan. The website is www.explorebuffaloniagara.com

The press conference announcing the effort was held April 23 at WNED. An invitation dvd featuring a message from Warren Buffett was mailed to 1,500 CEOs’ homes, a second bit of information is

being sent to CEOs' private e-mail addresses, and literature is being sent every two weeks to their homes. The Coalition then watched the dvd, and responded very favorably.

The kickoff on September 12 will take place at the Albright Knox Art Gallery. There will be a mentoring program between local and guest CEOs, and guest speakers from the federal, state, and IDA levels. The event wraps up September 14 at Curtain Up! (although there are optional weekend activities). Already confirmed are representatives from Russia, Germany, and Communist China. The plan is to do this every three years.

There was no old or new business.

The next general meeting date was set for Friday, September 7 at 8:30 a.m. at the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (thanks to Samuel Ferraro). The Co-Chairs thanked the group, and the meeting was adjourned at 10 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
August 31, 2007